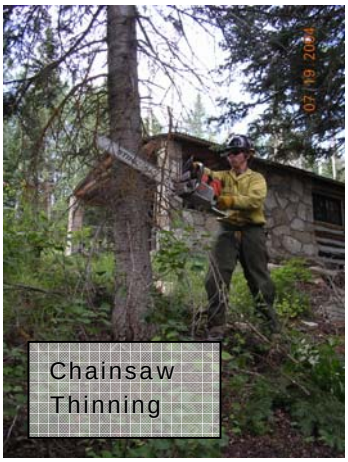
Collaborative Fuels Projects in Utah

Utah Bureau of Land Management

Since the inception of the National Fire Plan and in subsequent supporting documents and legislation, collaboration has been a focus for federal hazardous fuels treatments. Collaboration has traditionally focused on working with cooperators in developing priorities for treatments and on Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) projects and community fire-related planning efforts. In Utah, the Bureau of Land Management has added depth to our collaborative relationships by working with the State of Utah, other federal agencies, and non-governmental organizations on hazardous fuels treatments. This collaborative work has allowed for the integration of fuel treatment objectives with other land management activities including wildlife, range, forestry, and watershed. This work is in concert with current interests in cooperative conservation, where through environmental partnerships the federal government can enhance wildlife habitat, protect the environment, and promote conservation practices.

A common application of collaboration in Utah is where the BLM conducts fuel treatments in areas where pinyon and juniper have encroached upon historical sage and grasslands. Mechanical treatments utilizing heavy equipment (i.e. Bullhog) and hand thinning, mitigate the fire risk while reducing the encroachment and opening the area back to its historic condition. Following the mechanical treatments, cooperators assist with purchasing and planting native seed, and providing specialized seeding equipment.



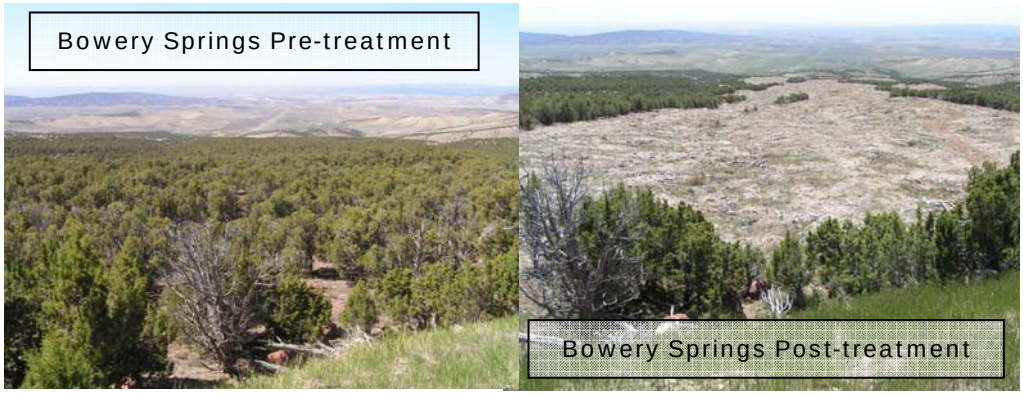
Through our collaboration, the BLM is able to leverage additional funds and support for projects. Cooperators involved with this type of collaborative work include: Utah Partnership for Conservation Development (UPCD), Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR), Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Joint Fire Science Program, Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife, Mule Deer Foundation, School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration (SITLA) of the State of Utah, Questar Gas Corp., USDA Forest Service, National Park Service, and grazing allotment associations.

Unlike other areas of the country, Utah has had difficulties in developing stewardship contract and biomass utilization projects as a means to pay for some of its fuels treatments. This has primarily been due to a lack of local markets and the limited value of the pinyon-juniper woodlands where many of the fuels projects have been occurring. Utah BLM has furthermore had a policy of not using hazardous fuels funding to purchase seed on non-WUI projects due to limited funds. This collaboration has added additional funding opportunities to BLM projects in Utah and extended limited funds.

Since the start of the National Fire Plan, 48 projects for 88,144 acres of collaborative treatments have occurred on the over 225,000 acres of land treated for hazardous fuel treatments. The contributed funds total $3,438,100 on these 48 projects and is broken down by field office in the below table. Some examples of successful projects around Utah follows the table.

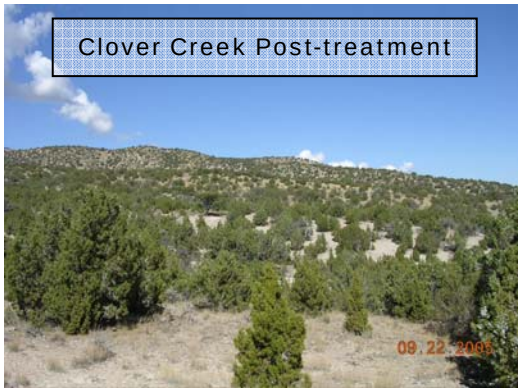
Field Office	Number of Projects	Acres	Collaborative Funding	BLM Fuels Funding
Vernal	15	17,180	$472,000	$148,000
Salt Lake	16	8,142	$1,805,600	$1,537,500
Moab	7	7,894	$539,500	$2,641,800
Cedar City	8	49,000	$221,000	N/A
Richfield	2	5,928	$400,000	$50,000
Utah Total	**46**	**88,144**	**$3,438,100**	

Vernal - The Bowery Springs Fuel Reduction is a 330 acre mechanical treatment using the Bullhog to reduce fuel loads and to provide increased winter range habitat for deer and elk on the Diamond Mountain/South Slope Unit of the Vernal Field Office. The BLM funded the planning of the project and costs of the fuels treatments with UDWR providing the seed for the project and the Diamond Mountain



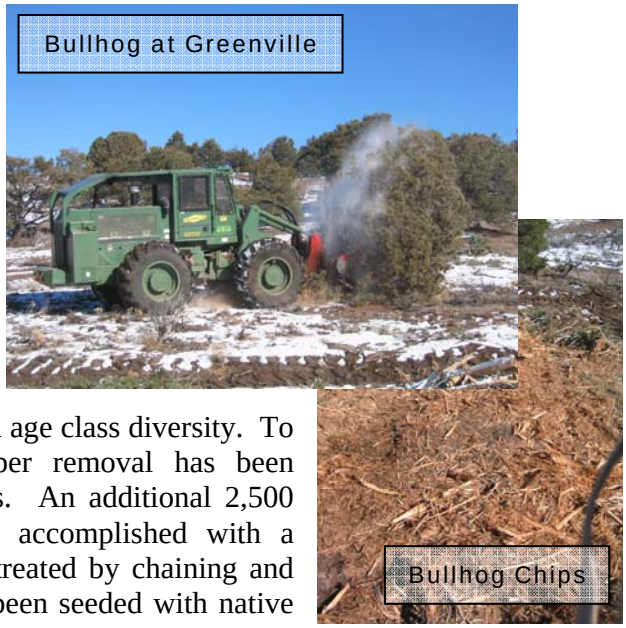
Landowners Association funding the aerial application of the seed. The project was completed in the fall of 2004. Monitoring has shown that the project was a success, and the area has received extensive use by both deer and elk since the project was implemented.

Moab – East Carbon Wildland/Urban Interface Treatment project is just one example of how ongoing collaborative fuel reduction efforts can help achieve goals and objectives in these important projects. An extensive area of BLM lands adjacent to the communities of East Carbon and Kenilworth in Carbon County were mechanically treated beginning in 2003. The primary goals and objectives were to protect the communities and to provide for firefighter safety in the event of a wildland fire with additional objectives of habitat improvement and the return of the area to a historical condition class/fire regime. While the mechanical and prescribed fire treatments of over 3,400 acres of pinyon/juniper was funded and implemented through BLM hazardous fuels funds, the UPCD provided for the purchase of seed as well as the resources for seed application following completion of the fuels reduction treatments.



Salt Lake - Prior to treatment, the vegetation in the Clover Creek project area was dominated by large, dense stands of juniper, with little or no understory. This area threatened the adjacent Wildland Urban Interface with a high potential to carry intense, fast-moving fires toward nearby developments. Within the project area, several fuel breaks of less flammable fuels were created. This is expected to help lessen the potential severity and intensity of wildland fires that could threaten nearby developments, namely the community of Rush Valley north and east of the project area. A collaborative approach was used on this project working with local and state officials in developing a Community Wildfire Protection Plan and the seed and aerial application of the seed was provided by UDWR.

Cedar City – Implementation of the Greenville Bench Enhancement Project began May 2003 and will continue over the next 5 years. It is a 40,000-acre landscape scale project that is located southwest of Beaver. A combination of manual, mechanical, and prescribed fire treatments will be used to accomplish the objectives of protecting the project area and neighboring private lands from wildfire, decreasing hazardous fuel loads, re-establish sagebrush travel corridors for wildlife, decrease pinyon-juniper encroachment, increase plant diversity with native and nonnative shrubs, forbs, and grasses, and increase plant biological and age class diversity. To date approximately 1,500 acres of pinyon/juniper removal has been accomplished with contract and BLM hand crews. An additional 2,500 acres of pinyon and juniper removal has been accomplished with a BullHog, and 1,800 acres of sagebrush has been treated by chaining and harrowing. Over 4,000 of the treated acres have been seeded with native and non-native species.



Richfield - The Seven Mile area had over 5900 acres of treatable, decadent, Wyoming big sagebrush habitat, which consisted of a monoculture of 80 to 100 year old sagebrush that was lacking an understory of desirable perennial grasses and forbs. A Dixie harrow treatment was applied with double harrowing of the vegetation and broadcast seeding of the harrowed area. A seed mix was developed by the wildlife, range and fuels staff to meet multiple objectives. The harrow treatment improved the vegetation and therefore restored the rangeland as the existing, decadent, sagebrush stand was of limited value to wintering big game, other wildlife species, livestock, and the watershed. An increase in desirable, upland forage and a decrease in overland flow/soil erosion has occurred. The hazardous fuels concerns (tall, decadent, big sagebrush) for the area were also decreased with shorter fuel heights and decreased fuel loads, resulting in decreased flame lengths and fireline intensity.